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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the formation of the Southern Extension Leadership Development (SELD) program. The program was developed in response to the growing need for understanding and coping with the many changes currently and potentially affecting Cooperative Extension Systems (CES). Two of the biggest changes affecting CES are the changing nature of work and authority relationships and the emergence of the information-technology era. The SELD program is a virtual organization, founded on the principles of collective leadership, that began informally and was based on the level of participation in the program by the directors and administrators of CES in the Southern Region. The centerpiece of SELD is the Managerial Assessment of Proficiency (MAP), a video-driven, competency-based, computer-scored simulation that assesses a participant's proficiency in 12 competencies, 2 leadership styles, and 8 values/drives. Since 1994, over 900 participants from CES, the land-grant university system of the southern region of the U.S., and elsewhere have gone through SELD. The paper describes the MAP program and offers a managerial assessment of those who have participated in SELD. Assessments show that managers' strengths are typically in planning and scheduling work and in identifying and solving problems, whereas weaknesses include thinking clearly and analytically. (RJM)

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Southern Extension Leadership Development: Leadership Development Through A Virtual Organization

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INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, The Cooperative Extension System, like most public and private organizations and agencies, have faced an era of economic scarcity. In addition, the rapid development of a global economy and increasingly complex and changing social, economic and environmental conditions at the local, community and state level have produced several external factors impacting their ability to carry out their mission and purpose. These external factors include:

- an accelerated rate of technological change,
- changing demographics of the people to be served,
- increased competition for public funding,
- shifting sources of support for teaching, research and extension, and
- world's knowledge base is accessible to whomever has the technology to access it.

In addition to the changing concerns and priorities of local communities and states, the rapid expansion and distribution of the world's knowledge base are bringing profound and interconnected changes that are producing internal challenges. These internal challenges include:

- becoming more customer driven,
- ensuring cost effective approaches to make the most of limited budgets,
- becoming fast and flexible to meet changing customer needs, and
- continuing improving to satisfy customer expectations.

Because of the speed in which change is occurring, State Cooperative Extension Systems (like all organizations) are at various stages of organizational transformation designed to enable them to respond quickly to change as needed.

Organizations that respond (transform themselves) to the changing nature of work and authority relationships, are learning organizations (Senge, 1990). The transition to a learning organization, however, is not easy. A major concern is that employees and supervisors often are expected to address problems and issues for which they have limited experience, and they must do so using authority-influence relationships for which they have little or no preparation. For these organizations to excel in the future, they must discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn as well as involving people at all levels in the organization (Senge, 1990).

A second challenge facing Cooperative Extension is the emergence of the information technology era. This new era has brought radical changes to organizational function and structure. Extension systems (all organizations) that control and channel information solely through hierarchal structures may have great difficulty being competitive in the information-rich global market place. The management principles and leadership styles followed in these institutions/hierarchal structures are often no longer appropriate. New management competencies and leadership styles will be needed.

Few extension administrators are professionally trained in the field of managerial leadership, rather they have been promoted to administration because they excelled in their subject matter discipline and learn their new craft by emulating those who proceeded them. While this practice is commonplace

throughout the industrialized world, these administrators often lack the necessary managerial and leadership competence necessary to truly transform organizations to compete in the information technology era (Patterson, 1998).

SOUTHERN EXTENSION LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT (SELD)

In response to the growing need for understanding and coping with the many changes currently and potentially impacting the Extension System, Cooperative Extension Directors and Administrators of the Southern Region called for the establishment of a regional leadership development program. The result was the formation of Southern Extension Leadership Development (SELD). An advisory committee composed of representatives of four southern states with expertise in several disciplines (including participants of the National Extension Leadership Development – NELD) helped formulate the program.

SELD is a virtual organization that knows no state boundaries. Its formation followed the principles of collective leadership in that it was developed as an informal system whose support from each of the Directors and Administrators of Cooperative Extension in the Southern Region was based on their level of participation in SELD. SELD is supported by user fees and the individuals who serve as resources for SELD are involved in leadership activities within their respective states.

The centerpiece of SELD is the Managerial Assessment of Proficiency (MAP) developed by Training House, Inc. of Princeton, NJ. MAP is a video-driven, competency-based, computer-scored simulation that assesses a participant's proficiency on 12 competencies, two leadership styles, and eight values/drives. Individual scores are compared to those of over 62,000 individuals from over 500 organizations worldwide who have taken MAP.

The 12 competencies upon which SELD participants are assessed are listed below:

Managing Your Job
- Time Management
- Setting Goals
- Planning and Scheduling Work

Relating to Others
- Listening and Organizing
- Giving Clear Information
- Getting Unbiased Information

Building the Team
- Training, Coaching, and Delegating
- Appraising People and Performances
- Disciplining and Counseling

Thinking Clearly
- Identifying and Solving Problems
- Making Decisions, Weighing Risk
- Thinking Clearly and Analytically

RESULTS

The first SELD workshop was held in April, 1994 at the Kentucky 4-H Center. Since its inception, 900+ participants have gone through SELD. Participants have come primarily from Cooperative Extension Systems and the Land Grant University System from the Southern Region of the United States. They include vice-presidents, directors of Cooperative Extension and Experiment Stations, deans,, center directors, department heads, district and county directors, county extension agents, and faculty from the 13 southern states and Delaware.

Each MAP workshop is 2½ days in length. It begins with an evening session to introduce individuals to the conceptual framework of SELD. Day one is devoted to assessing the 12 competencies. The assessment is based on wrong/right answers. The second day focuses on interpretation of results and discusses leadership in a changing organization. Participants also develop a learning plan to increase their leadership and managerial knowledge and skills. These learning plans provide the foundation for follow-up seminars on the 12 competencies.

Table 1 reflects the managerial assessment of proficiency group composite assessment for the nearly 900 who have participated in SELD. Overall, participants scored at the 54th percentile when compared to the 62,000 individuals in the MAP database.

As a group, Extension's strengths are in the competencies of "Planning and Scheduling Work" (62%), "Identifying and Solving Problems" (59%), "Making Decisions, Weighing Risks" (58%) "Giving Clear Information" (56%), and "Training, Coaching and Delegating" (58%). These are important competencies that Extension workers must have to design and implement educational programs that meet customer needs or assist clients with answers to questions in a timely and efficient manner. These competencies will become even more important as resources and staff become more limited. The use of para-professionals, work teams and volunteers may help us to deliver more programs or more effectively use our resources, however, Extension staff will need the skills to effectively utilize these human resources.

Several competencies will need strengthening if Extension staff are to design and implement customer driven programs that are cost effective and satisfy customer expectations. These include "Setting Goals and Standards," "Getting Unbiased Information," "Time Management and Prioritizing," "Appraising People and Performance" and "Disciplining and Counseling." Our participant group scores were average or slightly above average (50% -53%) for these competencies. Federal and state governments as well as clientele groups are requiring increased accountability for the resources we use. Such accountability often takes the form of requiring public agencies to set measurable goals and standards. To meet organizational goals and standards, individual goals and standards must be set. This requires that extension professionals have the ability to manage activities and projects toward measurable goals, manage their own and other's time effectively, obtain unbiased information about the quality of the program being delivered and those delivering it. Should the quality or performance be unsatisfactory, extension staff should have the ability to carry out a constructive performance appraisal and provide counseling and discipline, if needed, to restore an employee's performance.

The weaker competency areas were "Thinking Clearly and Analytically" (42%) and "Listening and Organizing" (48%). As educators, we are constantly interpreting situations and information, much of it in the form of raw data, before deciding what action to take. This requires operating with a sound

database identifying valid premises and drawing logical conclusions from them. The quality of these decisions are also related to the quality of information we receive and how we understand, organize and analyze information. This process is directly related to our skill in listening to the facts and feelings of others. It should be noted that in the world of work, one's performance in one competency area may be correlated to performance in another competency area. In MAP, however, each of the competencies are scored independently of all other competencies.

Table 1. Group Composite Managerial Assessment of Proficiency for SELD Participants (N=873)

		0% 25% 50% 75% 100%	
MANAGING YOUR JOB	Time Management & Prioritizing. .	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	53%
	Setting Goals & Standards	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	50%
	Planning & Scheduling Work.	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	62%
ADMINISTRATIVE COMPOSITE.		OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO	55%
RELATING TO OTHERS	Listening & Organizing.	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	48%
	Giving Clear Information	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	56%
	Getting Unbiased Information.	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	51%
COMMUNICATION COMPOSITE		OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO	52%
BUILDING THE TEAM	Training, Coaching & Delegating. .	XXXXXXXXXXXXXSXXXXXXX	58%
	Appraising People & Performance .	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	54%
	Disciplining & Counseling	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	52%
SUPERVISORY COMPOSITE		OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO	55%
THINKING CLEARLY	Identifying & Solving Problems. . .	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	59%
	Making Decisions, Weighing Risk .	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	58%
	Thinking Clearly & Analytically. . .	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	42%
COGNITIVE COMPOSITE		OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO	53%
PROFICIENCY COMPOSITE		HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH	54%

Faculty, to be successful in this new era, must have competencies in working in teams, interdisciplinary communications, and use of results assessments based on performance rather than activity. The long-range objective of Southern Extension Leadership Development (SELD) is to prepare existing and potential leaders in extension, research, and teaching in the USDA-Land Grant University System for the transition to the learning organization. To effectively make the transition from a functional hierarchy to a learning organization that utilizes an information technology structure requires a three-pronged approach.

The First Step. A systematic training program designed to develop leadership and managerial capacity, communications proficiency, and team skills should be provided to existing and potential leaders in Extension. Organizations in the information technology era will increasingly rely on self-designed, self-managed teams. Because MAP provides an objective measure of managerial competencies, participants have a better understanding of their individual strengths and weaknesses. As a consequence, participants are able to target areas for improvement. Follow-up seminars are being provided to participants wanting to improve in one or more of the 12 competencies for which they were tested. Each seminar lasts about four hours. Participants view analyses of episodes drawn from MAP. Working interactively with video and workbook, participants identify basic skills and techniques. They then apply their new learning in a variety of hands-on exercises: case method, role play, script analysis, games/simulations, and self-inventories. Participants also develop action plans to guide their managerial development.

The Second Step. Senior Extension executives should continually assess their knowledge of and skills in utilizing leadership and management principles required of a learning organization. While the command and control principles served the system well in the industrial era, the speed and complexity of information transfer requires leadership and management principles and organizational structures that tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels of the learning organization. Executive development programs should be developed for senior executives to help them insure an organizational structure that is 1) customer driven, 2) cost effective, 3) fast and flexible, and 4) continually improving.

The Third Step. Many individuals have completed professional development programs on collective leadership and institutional change. This core group could provide opportunities for new connections and greater communications on performance development of the individual and of the learning organization.

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